

# Philemon

## Salutation

1:1 From Paul,<sup>1</sup> a prisoner of Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and Timothy our<sup>3</sup> brother, to Philemon, our dear friend<sup>4</sup> and coloborer, 1:2 to Apphia<sup>5</sup> our sister,<sup>6</sup> to Archippus our<sup>7</sup> fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your house. 1:3 Grace and peace to you<sup>8</sup> from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

## Thanks for Philemon's Love and Faith

1:4 I always thank my God<sup>9</sup> as I remember you in my prayers,<sup>10</sup> 1:5 because I hear<sup>11</sup> of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>12</sup> for all the saints.<sup>13</sup>

**1 tn** Grk "Paul." The word "from" is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to indicate the sender of the letter.

**2 sn** The phrase *a prisoner of Christ Jesus* implies that Paul was being held prisoner because of his testimony for Christ Jesus. Paul's imprisonment was due to his service to Christ, in the same manner as John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos because of his testimony (Rev 1:9).

**3 tn** "our" is not present in the Greek text, but was supplied to bring out the sense in English.

**4 tn** Grk "dear." The adjective is functioning as a substantive; i.e., "dear one" or "dear friend."

**5 sn** Apphia is thought to be the wife of Philemon.

**6 tc** Most witnesses (D<sup>2</sup> Ψ 20) here read τῆ ἀγαπητῆ (*tē agapētē*, "beloved, dear"), a reading that appears to have been motivated by the masculine form of the same adjective in v. 1. Further, the earliest and best witnesses, along with a few others (N A D\* F G I P 048 0278 33 81 104 1739 1881 pc), have ἀδελφῆ (*adelphē*, "sister"). Thus on internal and external grounds, ἀδελφῆ is the strongly preferred reading.

**7 tn** Though the term "our" does not appear in the Greek text it is inserted to bring out the sense of the passage.

**8 tn** Grk "Grace to you and peace."

**9 sn** I always thank my God. An offer of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστώ, *eucharistō*) to God is a customary formula for Paul in many of his epistles (cf. Rom 1:8, 1 Cor 1:4, Eph 1:16, Col 1:3, 1 Thess 1:2, 2 Thess 1:3). The content of the thanksgiving typically points to the work of God in the salvation of the believers to whom he [Paul] writes.

**10 tn** Grk "making remembrance (or "mention") of you in my prayers."

**11 tn** The Greek present participle ἀκούων (*akouōn*, "hearing") is an adverbial participle of cause relating to εὐχαριστώ (*eucharistō*, "I give thanks").

**12 sn** Your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. In accord with Paul, John also advocates this combination of "faith in Christ and love for the saints." The believers' invisible faith becomes visible in the demonstration of love for others. This, of course, is not only desired, but commanded (1 John 3:23). Although Paul's comment here may appear as a stock expression to the casual reader, praising Philemon for his track record of faithfulness to Christ demonstrated in love for the saints is actually integral to the author's argument in this short but pithy letter. Paul will soon ask Philemon to demonstrate this love toward Onesimus, his runaway slave.

**13 tn** The Greek is somewhat awkward here. It appears as though the text reads "...the love and faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints." In other Pauline letters the emphasis seems to be "faith in Christ Jesus and love for all of the saints." Some ancient mss have altered the wording to produce a smoother reading; scribes changed the wording to resemble the more readable versions in Eph 1:15 and Col

1:6 I pray<sup>14</sup> that the faith you share with us may deepen your understanding of every blessing<sup>15</sup> that belongs to you<sup>16</sup> in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

1:4, "your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints."

**14 tn** The term ὅπως (*hopōs*) refers back to the idea of prayer (μνησάν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, *mnēian sou poioumenos epi tōn proseuchōn mou*) in 1:4. See BDAG 718 s.v. 2.b; P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC), 279. The indicative "I pray that" was supplied in the English in order to make this connection clear.

**15 tn** Grk "everything good."

**16 tc** † ὑμῖν (*humin*, "you") is found in many valuable witnesses (1<sup>61</sup> N F G P 0278 33 1739 1881 al sy co). The witnesses for ἡμῖν (*hēmīn*, "us") are not as strong (A C D Ψ 048<sup>ad</sup> 20), but nevertheless represent a broad base. Internally, ἡμῖν could be favored because of second person pronouns surrounding it, making it the harder reading. On the other hand, the last second person plural pronoun was in v. 3, and the next one will not show up until v. 22, a fact which tends to counter the internal argument on behalf of ἡμῖν. Although a decision is difficult, with the internal evidence being capable of favoring either reading, our preference is based on the external evidence; ὑμῖν is thus slightly preferred.

**17 tn** Grk "that the fellowship of your faith might become effective in the knowledge of everything good that is in us in Christ." There are numerous difficulties with the translation and interpretation of this verse: (1) What is the meaning of ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως σου (*hē koinōnia tēs pisteōs sou*, "the fellowship of your faith")? Several suggestions are noted: (a) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "monetary support" and τῆς πίστεως as a genitive of source, the phrase could refer to Philemon's financial giving which he has done according to his faith; (b) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "sharing" or "communicating" and the genitive τῆς πίστεως as an objective genitive, then the meaning would be "sharing the faith" as a reference to evangelistic activity; (c) taking κοινωνία in a distributive sense referring to fellowship with other believers, and τῆς πίστεως as a reference to the common trust all Christians have in Jesus, then the meaning is Christian fellowship centered on faith in Jesus; (d) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "participation" and the genitive τῆς πίστεως as a reference to the thing participated in, the meaning would then be Philemon's "participation in the faith"; (2) what is the meaning of ἐνεργῆς (*energēs*; Does it mean "active" or "effective"?) and ἐπιγνώσει (*epignōsei*; Does it refer to simply understanding? Or "experiencing" as well?); (3) what is the meaning of the phrase παντός ἀγαθοῦ (*παντός agathou*)? and (4) what is the force of εἰς Χριστόν (*eis Christon*)? It is difficult to arrive at an interpretation that deals adequately with all these questions, but given the fact that Paul stresses what Philemon has done for the brothers (cf. the γὰρ [*gar*] in v. 7), it seems that his concern in v. 6 is on Philemon's fellowship with other believers and how he has worked hard to refresh them. In this interpretation: (1) the phrase ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως σου is taken to refer to fellowship with other believers; (2) ἐνεργῆς is taken to mean "effective" (i.e., more effective) and ἐπιγνώσει involves both understanding and experience; (3) the phrase παντός ἀγαθοῦ refers to every spiritual blessing and (4) εἰς Χριστόν carries a locative idea meaning "in Christ." The result is that Paul prays for Philemon that he will be equipped to encourage and love the saints more as he himself is brought to a place of deeper understanding of every spiritual blessing he has in Christ; out of the overflow of his own life, he will minister to others.

1:7<sup>1</sup> have had great joy and encouragement because<sup>2</sup> of your love, for the hearts<sup>3</sup> of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

*Paul's Request for Onesimus*

1:8 So, although I have quite a lot of confidence in Christ and could command you to do what is proper, 1:9 I would rather appeal<sup>4</sup> to you on the basis of love – I, Paul, an old man<sup>5</sup> and even now a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus<sup>6</sup> – 1:10 I am appealing<sup>7</sup> to you concerning my child, whose spiritual father I have become<sup>8</sup> during my imprisonment,<sup>9</sup> that is, Onesimus, 1:11 who was formerly useless to you, but is now useful to you<sup>10</sup> and me. 1:12 I have sent<sup>11</sup>

him (who is my very heart)<sup>12</sup> back to you. 1:13 I wanted to keep him so that he could serve me in your place<sup>13</sup> during<sup>14</sup> my imprisonment for the sake of the gospel.<sup>15</sup> 1:14 However,<sup>16</sup> without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your good deed would not be out of compulsion, but from your own willingness. 1:15 For perhaps it was for this reason that he was separated from you for a little while, so that you would have him back eternally,<sup>17</sup> 1:16 no longer as a slave,<sup>18</sup> but more than a slave, as a dear brother. He is especially so to me, and even more so to you now, both humanly speaking<sup>19</sup> and in the Lord. 1:17 Therefore if you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would me. 1:18 Now if he has defrauded you of anything or

<sup>1</sup> tn Here γάρ (*gar*) has not been translated because of differences between Greek and contemporary English style.

<sup>2</sup> tn The Greek preposition ἐπί (*epi*) is understood here in a causal sense, i.e., “because.”

<sup>3</sup> tn The word translated “hearts” here is σπλάγχνα (*splanchna*). Literally the term refers to one’s “inward parts,” but it is commonly used figuratively for “heart” as the seat of the emotions. See BDAG 938 s.v. σπλάγγων 2 (cf. Col 3:12, Phil 2:1).

<sup>4</sup> tn Or “encourage.”

<sup>5</sup> tn Or perhaps “an ambassador” (so RSV, TEV), reading πρεσβευτής for πρεσβύτες (a conjecture proposed by Bentley, cf. BDAG 863 s.v. πρεσβύτες). NRSV reads “old man” and places “ambassador” in a note.

<sup>6</sup> tn Grk “a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

<sup>7</sup> tn Or “I am encouraging...”

<sup>8</sup> tn Grk “my child whom I have begotten.” The adjective “spiritual” has been supplied before “father” in the translation to clarify for the modern reader that Paul did not literally father a child during his imprisonment. Paul’s point is that he was instrumental in Onesimus’ conversion while in prison.

<sup>9</sup> sn *During my imprisonment.* Apparently Onesimus became a believer under Paul’s shepherding while he [Paul] was a prisoner in Rome.

<sup>10</sup> tc † A correlative καί (*kai*, “both you”) is found in a few witnesses (N<sup>\*</sup>: F G 33 104 pc), perhaps either to underscore the value of Onesimus or in imitation of the νομί δεε καί (*nomi de kai*) in v. 9. The lack of καί is read by most witnesses, including N<sup>2</sup> A C D 0278 1739 1881 ̄̄ it. Although a decision is difficult, the shorter reading has a slight edge in both internal and external evidence. NA<sup>27</sup> places the καί in brackets, indicating some doubts as to its authenticity.

<sup>11</sup> tc There are several variants at this point in the text, most of them involving the addition of προσλαβοῦ (*proslabou*, “receive, accept”) at various locations in the verse. But all such variants seem to be motivated by the harsh syntax of the verse without this verb. Without the verb, the meaning is that Onesimus is Paul’s “very heart,” though this is an awkward expression especially because of τοῦτ ἔστιν (*tout estin*, “this is, who is”) in the middle cluttering the construction. Nowhere else in the NT is σπλάγγνα (*splanchna*, here translated “heart”) used in apposition to people. It is thus natural that scribes would want to fill out the text here, and they did so apparently with a verb that was ready at hand (borrowed from v. 17). With the verb the sentence is converted into an object-complement construction: “I have sent him back to you; accept him, that is, as my very heart.” But both the fact

that some important witnesses (N<sup>\*</sup> A F G 33 pc) lack the verb, and that its location floats in the various constructions that have it, suggest that the original text did not have προσλαβοῦ.

<sup>12</sup> tn Grk “whom I have sent.” The Greek sentence was broken up in the English translation for the sake of clarity. Although the tense of the Greek verb here is past (an aorist tense) the reader should understand that Onesimus may well have been standing in the very presence of Paul as he wrote this letter.

<sup>13</sup> tn That is, “who means a great deal to me”; Grk “whom I have sent to you, him, this one is my heart.”

<sup>14</sup> tn This is one of the clearest texts in the NT in which ὑπέρ is used for substitution. Cf. ExSyn 387.

<sup>15</sup> tn Grk “in my imprisonment.” Paul seems to expect release from his imprisonment after some time (cf. v. 22), but in the meantime the assistance that Onesimus could provide would be valuable to the apostle.

<sup>16</sup> tn Grk “in the chains of the gospel.” On the translation “imprisonment for the sake of the gospel,” cf. BDAG 219 s.v. δεσμός 1.a where it says: “Of. simply in ref. to the locale where bonds or fetters are worn imprisonment, prison (Diod. S. 14, 103, 3; Lucian, Tox. 29; Jos., Ant. 13, 294; 302, Vi. 241; Just., A I, 67, 6 al.) Phil 1:7, 13f, 17; Col 4:18; Phlm 10. μέχρη δεσμών 2 Ti 2:9. ἐν τοῖς δε. τοῦ εὐαγγελίου in imprisonment for the gospel Phlm 13; cf. ISm 11:1; Pol 1:1.”

<sup>17</sup> tn Though the Greek text does not read the term “however,” it is clearly implied and thus supplied in the English translation to accent the contrastive nature of Paul’s statement.

<sup>18</sup> sn So that you would have him back eternally. The notion here is not that Onesimus was to be the slave of Philemon eternally, but that their new relationship as brothers in Christ would transcend the societal structures of this age. The occasion of Onesimus’ flight to Rome would ultimately be a catalyst in the formation of a new and stronger bond between these two men.

<sup>19</sup> tn Although the Greek word δοῦλος (*doulos*) is sometimes translated “servant” here (so KJV), the word “slave” is a much more candid and realistic picture of the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. In the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century the slave was considered a “living tool” of the master. The slave was “property” in every sense of the word. This understanding heightens the tense scenario that is in view here. It is likely that Onesimus may have even feared for his life upon returning to Colossae. Undoubtedly Paul has asked this runaway slave to return to what could amount to a potentially severe and life-endangering situation.

<sup>20</sup> tn Grk “in the flesh.”

owes you anything, charge what he owes<sup>1</sup> to me. **1:19** I, Paul, have written<sup>2</sup> this letter<sup>3</sup> with my own hand:<sup>4</sup> I will repay it. I could also mention that you owe<sup>5</sup> me your very self. **1:20** Yes, brother, let me have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.<sup>6</sup> **1:21** Since I was confident that you would obey, I wrote to you, because I knew that you would do even more than<sup>7</sup> what I am asking you to do. **1:22** At the same time also, prepare a place for me to stay, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given back to you.

### Concluding Greetings

**1:23** Epaphras,<sup>8</sup> my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. **1:24** Mark, Aristarchus,<sup>9</sup> Demas<sup>10</sup> and Luke, my collaborators, greet you too. **1:25** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be<sup>11</sup> with your spirit.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Grk "charge it to me."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Grk "I wrote" Here ἔγραψα (*egrapsa*) is functioning as an epistolary aorist. Paul puts it in the past tense because from Philemon's perspective when he reads the letter it will, of course, already have been written.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The phrase "this letter" does not appear in the Greek text, but is supplied in the English translation to clarify the meaning.

<sup>4</sup> **sn** *With my own hand*. Paul may have considered this letter so delicate that he wrote the letter himself as opposed to using an amanuensis or secretary.

<sup>5</sup> **sn** The statement *you owe me your very self* means that Paul was responsible for some sort of blessing in the life of Philemon; though a monetary idea may be in mind, it is perhaps better to understand Paul as referring to the spiritual truth (i.e., the gospel) he had taught Philemon.

<sup>6</sup> **sn** *Refresh my heart in Christ*. Paul desired that Philemon refresh his heart in the same way that he [Philemon] had refreshed the hearts of other believers (cf. Phlm 7), that is, by forgiving and accepting Onesimus. In this way the presence and character of Jesus Christ would be vividly seen in Philemon's attitude toward his runaway slave.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Grk "that you would even go beyond."

<sup>8</sup> **sn** *Epaphras* is probably a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus. This is probably the same individual whom Paul spoke of as "my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier" in Phil 2:25 (see also Phil 4:18). He is also mentioned in Col 1:7 and 4:12, where he is a founder of the church in Colossae (BDAG 360 s.v. Ἐπαφρόδιτος).

<sup>9</sup> **sn** *Aristarchus* accompanied Paul on his collection-journey when Paul left for Rome in Acts 27:2. He is also mentioned as a fellow prisoner in Col 4:10.

<sup>10</sup> **sn** *Demas* is most likely the same individual mentioned by the Apostle Paul in 2 Tim 4:10. Apparently, he later on abandoned the faith because of his love of the world.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Grk "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with your spirit." The elided verb, normally an optative, has been rendered as "be."

<sup>12</sup> **tc** Most witnesses, including several excellent ones (⋈ C D<sup>1</sup> Ψ 0278 31 lat sy), conclude this letter with ἄμην (*amēn*, "amen"). Such a conclusion is routinely added by scribes to NT books because a few of these books originally had such an ending (cf. Rom 16:27; Gal 6:18; Jude 25). A majority of Greek witnesses have the concluding ἄμην in every NT book except Acts, James, and 3 John (and even in these books, ἄμην is found in some witnesses). It is thus a predictable variant. Further, several good witnesses (⋈<sup>87</sup> A D\* 048<sup>10</sup> 6 33 81 1739\* 1881 sa) lack the ἄμην, rendering the omission the preferred reading.